



# **HARNESSING THE POWER OF PROVENANCE IN ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION**



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**Using EAC to Document  
the Relationships  
Between Records and  
Recordkeeping Activity  
and to Improve Access  
to and Understanding of  
Records**

# **THIS TALK WILL COVER:**



- Documenting the complex reality of provenance
- The role, function and structure of EAC
- Future directions

# WHAT IS ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION?

- Provenance is the primary locus of archival intellectual control & description
- Records are 'information created or received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs' (ISO15489, *Records Management*)
- Importance of documenting records in context

# WHAT IS PROVENANCE?



- The relationships between records and the organisations or individuals that created, accumulated and/or maintained and used them in the conduct of personal or corporate activity.

(ISAD (G), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2000)

# OUR JOB IS TO DOCUMENT PROVENANCE

- Provenance is what gives records meaning – it is what makes them records
- To understand and use records we have to understand and document the purpose and context of their creation
- We have to understand and document the relationship between recordkeeping activity and the records created by organisations/persons
- Documentation of provenance can be a useful point of access to records

# PROBLEMS WITH PROVENANCE



- Provenance is more complex than traditional systems of archival description recognise – this is especially true with electronic records
- Complex web of dynamic inter-relationships between different records creating entities
- Often there is not a simple 1-1 relationship between records creators and records
- Administrative change in governments and organisations (successive multiple provenance)
- Incidence of simultaneous multiple provenance

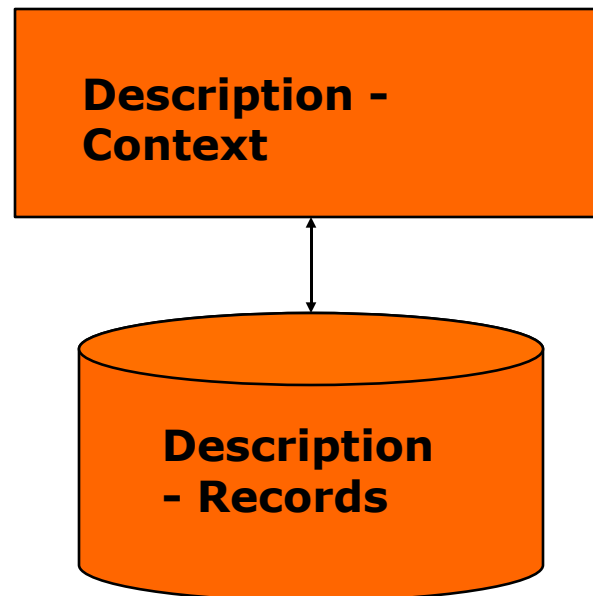
# HOW THEN SHOULD WE DOCUMENT PROVENANCE?



- We should build archival systems that reflect rather than distort the complex reality of provenance/recordkeeping activity
- Separate but linked descriptions of records and records creating entities enables us to manage and represent the complex reality of provenance
- Data inputs into an archival descriptive system may look very different to the outputs of that system – while inputs should be standardised, outputs can take an infinite variety of forms

# Australian “Series System” and context

- The key to the Australian system is its separation of context description from record description



# ROLE/FUNCTION OF EAC



- An encoding standard for the online exchange of archival descriptions that identify and describe provenance entities to enable:
  - Structured documentation of relationships between related entities, including administrative change
  - Users to understand the context of records creation and use and hence the meaning/purpose of records
  - Linking of and access to descriptions of often diverse and/or distributed holdings of records created by the same entity.

# 3 MAIN COMPONENTS OF DESCRIPTION OF PROVENANCE ENTITIES

- Standardised uniform authority controlled headings/access points for retrieval purposes
- Description of the records creating entity (biographical/administrative history), their functional responsibilities and their recordkeeping activities
- Cross references/links to descriptions of records created by the entity and to other related entities (ie. Relationships)

# ENCODED ARCHIVAL CONTEXT



- 5 Areas:
  - Identity Area
  - Description Area
  - Relationships Area
  - Other Resources Area
  - Control Area

# 1. Identity Area



- Provide information which identifies uniquely the corporate body, the person or the family
- Provides for standardized access points, non-preferred forms of name, etc

## 2. Description Area



- Provides information as a free text  
biographical, corporate or family history
- And/or as a structured text as in specified  
elements (eg. place, function, etc)
- All elements should include date qualifiers

# 3. Relationships Area



- Record relationships with other corporate bodies, persons and/or families
- Records relevant information as a free text narrative description
- And/or as a structured text as specified in the elements
- And/or links to other EAC records
- All relationships should include date qualifiers

# 4. Other Resources Area




- References to related resources such as publications, photographs, websites, etc

# 5. Control Area



- Provide information on sources used to compile the EAC record, its creator(s) and status, eg:
  - Record identifier
  - Record type
  - Record status
  - Other encoding standards used
  - Maintenance history
  - Language of description

# Relating records creators to archival and other resources



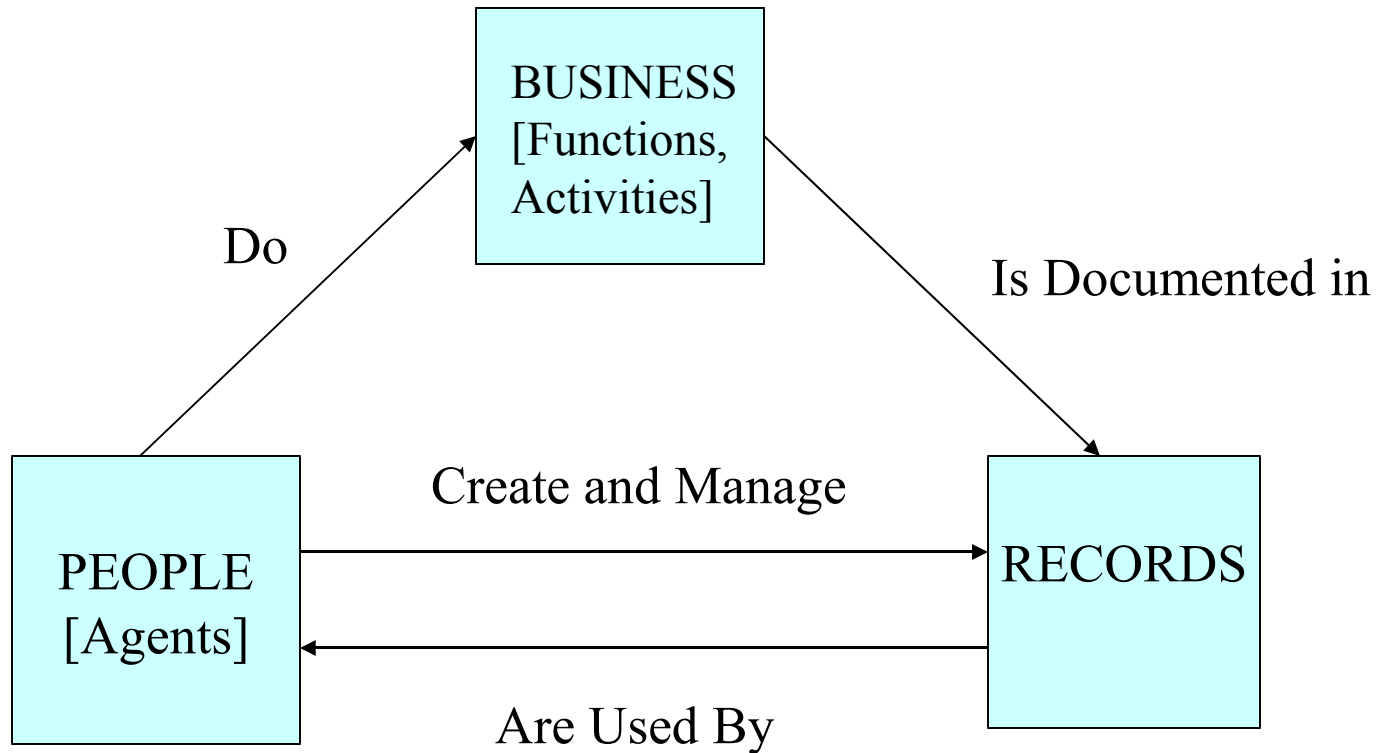
- Provide information on and/or links to archival descriptions, bibliographical and other relevant resources:
  - Titles and identifiers of related resources
  - Types of related resources
  - Nature of relationships
  - Dates of related resources and/or relationships

# WHAT ABOUT FUNCTIONS?



- Records are created when people or organisations perform functions/activities
- Functions are independent entities in their own right that require separate description with links to records and records creators
- Functions are not aspects of the life of a records creating entity – on the contrary agencies are often just episodes in the life of a function

# THREE RECORDKEEPING ENTITIES



# THE FUTURE?



- Archives need to make use of ***both*** EAD and EAC
- EAC/EAD records need to be networked – because context and provenance information usually transcends the boundaries of different archival programs
- The ICA is developing ISAF, a 3<sup>rd</sup> international standard for describing functions and activities – logically, this should lead to an expansion of EAC

# FINAL THOUGHT



- 'Records are not passive objects to be described retrospectively. Rather, they are agents of action, active participants in business activity that can only be described through a series of parallel and iterative processes.' (Barbara Reed)

# SOME USEFUL SITES



- <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/eac/>
- <http://www.archivists.org.au/busrec>
- <http://leaf-eu.org>